The CUNY Young Adult Program
PREPARING YOUNG ADULTS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION TRADES

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE
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**About the Youth Development Institute**

The Youth Development Institute (YDI) is an intermediary organization. Founded in 1991 by Michele Cahill, YDI strengthens non-profit organizations and public agencies and builds programs that address gaps in services, in New York City and nationally. It provides training and on-site technical assistance, conducts research, develops practice and policy innovations and supports advocacy. YDI’s work is based on principles that are fundamental to creating effective programs for adolescents: caring and sustained relationships with adults, safety, belonging, opportunity to build competency and mastery, engaging activities, high expectations, caring relationships, and student voice and participation. These principles form the youth development framework, which research has determined are essential to enabling youth to achieve positive outcomes and a successful transition to adulthood. YDI applies these principles across all youth fields including education, after-school, services to youth who have dropped out, and internships; and across all key institutions including schools, community organizations, colleges, and major institutions such as museums and libraries that have programs for young people.

YDI’s research, training, coaching, and organizational and program development is tailored to each field and institution. YDI helps organizations to apply promising lessons from research and practice, design their programs based on sound knowledge about what works, and provides their leaders and staff with the information and skills to implement them effectively. YDI identifies gaps in youth services and directs attention to populations that have been inadequately addressed, developing new programs that respond to these needs. YDI’s major projects are rigorously evaluated by independent firms, and the results published and widely disseminated to advance the field. In sum, YDI promotes policies and strengthens organizations so that they may provide young people with the powerful, sustained, and joyful experiences that will help them grow and develop into successful adults.
INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

While much is known about how to prepare young adults for successful entry into the workforce, rarely is this knowledge fully applied in actual programs. Limitations of funding, organizational skills and knowledge, or program guidelines often reduce the effectiveness of these efforts. The CUNY Young Adult Program (CYAP), a collaboration of NYC College of Technology, The Carpenters Union, and Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, brings together the key elements for success and is implemented by competent and experienced staff with strong institutional support.

The program offers unemployed young adults an intensive, 30-hour-per-week regimen of construction skills, academics targeted toward the construction industries, counseling, tangible supports and rewards, work experience supervised by skilled adult workers, and direct links to paying jobs.

The program is a partnership of organizations that have an interest in this population. Increasingly partnerships are viewed as a means to bring together resources and varied assets to serve a population that has diverse and multiple needs. But partnerships vary greatly in their effectiveness. In CYAP, the strengths of each partner, distinct but complementary, are combined in a way that sends the same, powerful messages to the young adults: take this experience seriously and you will gain significant skills and connections to help you succeed:

- Cypress Hills brings its connection to young people in their neighborhood which provides a basis in trust for the students and their families. The organization’s deep commitment to the participants and knowledge of youth development practice help to assure sustained and supportive relationships with students.

- The College brings strong knowledge and skills in specific academic and training areas as well as a connection for students to a highly respected city institution, a strong asset when they have to search for employment.

- The Carpenters Union brings skills in specific construction trades, the experience of its members who supervise young people on worksites, knowledge of worksite culture, and direct connections to paying jobs.

Together, the three institutions share a history of collaboration that makes the melding of these different capacities smooth and reduces the costs of collaboration.

This CYAP focuses on fairly high-skilled youth who are unemployed, have a diploma or GED, and at least a 10th grade reading level, the latter reflecting the skill level required for the industry. It also has a rigorous screening process. The choice of serving higher-skilled youth is a hard one: all young adults need this
support. But most programs do not have adequate funding to assure the sustained participation levels that will allow youth with lower levels of readiness to build up their skills over time. CYAP determined to enroll students that it could serve successfully.

For young adults who are not yet at this level, the CEO, in collaboration with the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, is funding The Young Adult Literacy Program that targets youth with low academic skills who have dropped out. The NYC College of Technology and Cypress Hills, in collaboration with YDI, work with youth who are entering college after having received a GED or having been at risk in high school.

Given that programs tend to be designed and funded to serve segments of the population of young adults who are out of school and out of work, the CYAP is well-designed for its particular segment. One day perhaps there will be adequate public funding to support the sustained pathways that are necessary to enable most of the disconnected young adult population to move into reasonable jobs. Today, experience and research give us a good idea of what these pathways will look like should they become possible. The CYAP is making a contribution not only by helping its students, but by adding to our knowledge of what works.

Peter Kleinbard  
Executive Director  
Youth Development Institute
OVERVIEW
OVERVIEW

This report documents the partnership between the New York City College of Technology (NYCCT), the New York District Council Carpenters Union (CU), and Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (Cypress Hills) to provide young adults with sustainable employment. The effort is part of the CUNY Young Adult Program (CYAP), in which three CUNY colleges—LaGuardia Community College, Kingsborough Community College, and New York City College of Technology—offer career training to 18-24 year olds who have earned a high school diploma or GED but are not enrolled in school or currently employed. The project is funded by the Mayor’s Center on Economic Opportunity (CEO) as well as other sources.

In the NYCCT/CU/Cypress Hills program, young adults participate in a 13-week program that includes life skills and job readiness, academics that include industry-related mathematics and computer literacy, hands-on training in technical skills of carpentry trades, and application of those skills to actual construction projects. Staff from Cypress Hills spends a half day each week with the students, joining them in their classes and job sites.

The program incorporates high expectations with personal supports, incentives, and a team approach by staff from all the partners. It combines youth development, skills training and academics specific to an employment sector, and pre-apprenticeships in construction. It demonstrates how a community organization, higher education institution, and union can work together, each using its specific strengths, to connect young people to jobs that offer potential advancement and adequate income.

Just as the program was getting under way in October of 2008, the recession severely depressed the construction industry. Jobs disappeared and immediate placements for the young adults slowed. Funding for the program was cut after only one cycle. Yet the model and its implementation add to the knowledge of how to reengage young adults and put them on productive paths. The experience offers strategies for practitioners and implications for policy.

Origins & Partnerships

The project was a natural outgrowth of existing relationships among organizations with intersecting interests. Each partner knew one of the two others. NYCCT’s Workforce Development Center, established in 1990, had collaborated with the Carpenters Union on a similar program for slightly older adults. Cypress Hills and the Carpenters Union had operated five BuildingWorks programs, pre-apprenticeship training funded by NIEHS (National Institute for Environmental Health and Safety of the NIH). The Carpenters Union was one of
the original grantees under the Minority Training Program initiative in 1995 and has operated 22 training cycles since the program's inception, through NIEHS funding and partnerships with other agencies.

Support from the CEO enabled the establishment of CYAP, with each of the three colleges focusing on a different career area. LaGuardia offered allied health professions, Kingsborough focused on food services, and NYCCT continued its work on construction and facilities management and its collaboration with the Carpenters Union. The CEO sought to support programs that would provide unemployed youth with a certificate, related training, and help them connect to a job. The Youth Development Institute (YDI), an intermediary with a longstanding interest in the young adult population, worked closely with Cypress Hills on its Community Education Pathways to Success program for 18-24 year olds with low literacy levels. YDI had developed an academic pathway for students who had completed their GEDs so they could get college credits and a degree, a collaboration with NY CCT and Cypress Hills. Its interest in the CYAP reflected the need to explore other pathways that would provide these young adults with certification in skills that lead to employment.

A cohort of young adults was recruited from Brooklyn, with the Fifth Avenue Committee (a Brooklyn development agency), the New York Urban League, and Cypress Hills serving as the community organization partners with NYCCT and the CU. The college and union required that these students have a high school diploma or a GED.

CYAP was funded in the beginning of October, and within a few weeks the CU/NY CCT/Cypress Hills program was up and running. The startup was rapid, a testament to the level of trust and the ability of all three organizations to respond quickly to an opportunity. “We built on a previous relationship to expand and enhance an extremely effective program model,” said Chuck Hoffman, director of the Workforce Development Center at NYCCT. Cypress Hills, which already had close ties to this population, recruited quickly but with a clear sense of who would be able to complete the demanding training.

Each of the partners brought expertise as well as self-interest to the venture.

- The Carpenters Union has 25,000 members, and represents the carpentry trades of the construction industry, including dock builders, foundations, floor coverers, cabinet makers, mechanical moving parts, and carpentry, among others. The union ladder starts with participation in a four-year apprenticeship. Recruiting high-quality apprentices is a priority. Like many unions, entry into the CU used to be passed on from father to son; a lottery system has since replaced that process. With that came pressure to diversify the workforce. The CU is known for having made significant progress in this regard, and the BuildingWorks program has played a key role.
• Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation serves 9,000 residents in East New York, one of New York City’s poorest communities. The CYAP program is housed in the Career and Education programs division, and is part of a continuum of youth development programs under the YouthLEAD initiative (learning, educating others, and achieving our dreams) that offers pre-GED classes, GED classes, job placement, and college access to young people from the East New York and Cypress Hills neighborhoods of Brooklyn. Using youth development strategies, including the Primary Person model, Cypress Hills provides enduring connections to supportive adults for the young people before, during, and after the program.

• New York City College of Technology is a senior college within the CUNY system that serves 30,000 students annually. The Workforce Development Center is part of the Continuing Education Division, providing both registered students and other adults from New York City with workforce preparation and educational services including assessment, counseling, information and referral, career exploration, skills training, job development, and job placement. With the CYAP program, the mandate extended to the younger segment of the disconnected population and NYCCCT brought its expertise not only in employment preparation and job placement, but in academic areas including algebra and computer literacy. Hoffman said, “We tried to think of what sort of training would be feasible for young people with a high-school diploma or GED but no previous work experience. We had a previous relationship with the Carpenters Union and saw it as a wonderful vehicle to bring youth into construction trades. It all fit.”

The commitment to each other’s vision and the recognition that each added value are hallmarks of this partnership. Program structure, staffing, and implementation foster interaction and cross-fertilization among the players. “It was a team approach to make things happen for these young adults,” said Shemira Busby of NYCCT. “It’s not just the CBO (community-based organization) that brought them in that provides the support,” said Donald Killinger, director of the BuildingWorks program at the Carpenters Union. “It’s more than a partnership on paper. It really does work in practice.” Lowell Herscherger, Director of Career and Education Programs at Cypress Hills, concurs, “For the orientation, all the partners came out to our community and that was really important. That’s the way partnerships are supposed to be. The buy-in of all partners was clear.”

1 The practice of ensuring that every young person is connected to a caring adult who takes responsibility for guiding, advising, and advocating. See YDI’s publication Promising Practices for Young Adults (2008).
The Young Adult

The program serves young adults 18-24 years of age who are out of school and not working—“disconnected” from education and employment—but who have attained a high school credential (diploma or GED), and read at least at a tenth-grade level.

In New York City, the disconnected population in this age group is approximately 170,000; nationally the number is at least 3.5 million. Young people’s reasons for having become disconnected are varied. They may not be able to find work, or find work that pays a reasonable wage. They may have left school with poor skills, or without plans for the future. They may be parents or have other family responsibilities. They may have been incarcerated and are on parole.

Trying again takes persistence and resilience, as comments by 22-year-old Luis reveal:

I had 19 credits in eleventh grade at the High School of Art and Design [out of 44 needed to graduate]. My counselor said I’d be 21 before I finished high school, she said, “The way you’re going, you’re not going to do anything.” Instead of that bringing me down I used that to get myself up.

As Luis passed the Cypress Hills storefront office in his neighborhood, he checked out the list of available jobs and quickly realized that there were more jobs, and better jobs, that required a GED. Enrolling in the GED program at Cypress Hills, he took the exam and passed. When he returned to look at the list of jobs, career training coordinator Jessen Vasquez suggested the CYAP program. He graduated in February. Luis became employed in a warehousing job soon after he graduated, but since then, he has been laid off. Now he is attending a trade school in graphic arts, and Shemira Busby is trying to convince him to take courses at NYCCT instead.

Other participants signed up because “I have a baby on the way,” said one young man. “I have a lot of pressure from my family to find a good job,” said another. Yet another heard the program advertised on the radio and had always wanted to be a carpenter.

The CYAP program started with twelve participants enrolled in the Cypress Hills program, and 30 in the Urban League program. Nearly all the participants were male. One young woman participated.

A number of the participants had some experience with building or carpentry. Brian Higbee, an instructor in the Bronx job site, noted that, “most young men have been ‘playing’ in the [carpentry] field in non-union jobs—handyman, superintendent—through family members like an uncle, dad, and knowing other
people who've been through the program." Some were novices, while others, like Arnaldo, were fairly well along, “I’ve been doing construction since I was 17, framing, sheetrock, insulation, concrete. The stuff wasn’t new to me, but it sharpened my skills.”
Becoming Workers:
THE PROGRAM MODEL AND PROCESS
BECOMING WORKERS:
THE PROGRAM MODEL AND PROCESS

The CYAP program, while it built on the BuildingWorks model, was shorter by four weeks as a result of more limited funding. It followed a similar progression from recruitment through intensive orientation, immediate startup in classroom-based life and academic skills and hands-on technical learning, concluding with on-the-job construction projects and a culminating graduation. The training is designed to prepare young people for a variety of opportunities:

- Entry into the Carpenters Union and the four-year apprenticeship leading to becoming a journeyman, with average pay over $40/hour.

- Certification in OSHA (the ten-hour Occupational Safety and Health Administration class), required for all workers in New York State working on construction projects of $250,000 or more. The emphasis on safety is especially important for workers who handle asbestos and hazardous materials.

- Asbestos abatement. Workers can earn $27/hour for being an asbestos handler.

- Hazmat safety training in hazardous materials and working on scaffolds.

- Entry into other unions, such as the electricians union.

- Jobs in related companies, such as Con Edison.

Philosophy & Environment

The CYAP program merges youth development principles—caring adults, engaging activities that build skills and mastery, high expectations, continuity and support; with the standards necessary to succeed in the building trades—rigorous training and high-level technical skills, accountability, on-time attendance, literacy and numeracy required for reading plans and carrying out projects, teamwork, and ability to follow orders and respond to the authority of foremen.

The environment is one of “tough love.” The demands are clear and consistent and so are the tangible and intangible supports that surround the young adults. Jessen Vasquez from Cypress Hills has all the students’ numbers on her cell phone and calls back and forth are frequent at any hour of any day. She and Shemira Busby from NYCCT are on site regularly, and both provide one-on-one counseling and case management. The message to students, says Busby, is that “It’s about you.”
The program creates a “culture of being prepared,” says Donald Killinger:

*There’s a dress code: Boots, uniform even in class. After a while we notice that their appearance changes. Their self-identity begins to shift as a worker; they make comments about how others in their community see them in a more positive way. They look and feel like productive workers.*

The job site supervisors and instructors do not mince words, but at the same time provide the young adults with the information they need. Vivian Vázquez, director of the CEPS program at YDI, observed the interaction at the Bronx site:

*As Dennis Brown was showing the students the blueprints, he spoke sharply to the students about arriving in time to start work at 7:30. He sounded harsh, but immediately followed up with directions to the site, telling them that to get there on time, you have to get there a half hour ahead of time, find parking if they drive, locate the site. He took out a map to show them. He didn’t leave them hanging.*

This combination of high expectations, information, skills, and social and emotional support is a constant in the implementation of the program.

**Recruitment, Orientation, Selection & Retention**

Cypress Hills conducts the recruitment. Staff first reach out to young adults from their existing programs (YouthLEAD participants who have finished or are completing their GED, parents or staff from the Beacon or child care programs), then to the community as a whole. Recruitment for the CYAP program benefited from the years of the BuildingWorks program, as young people recommended the program to family and friends. Word-of-mouth is the primary means of recruitment, and little effort needs to be expended at this stage to attract a pool of applicants.

“We have great CBO partners,” notes Donald Killinger, referring to the range of groups the CU works with. “But I think that Cypress Hills is different in that it is truly a community-based organization, so most of the students live near each other. Most have been through other Cypress Hills programs—GED, youth employment. Chances are good that they have a brother or sister or cousin or even parents who have been through a Cypress Hills program.”

The initial recruitment and orientation make clear what is necessary to succeed in the program. Besides a high-school diploma or GED and fairly high reading and math levels, young adults need to be able to follow directions, respect authority, and be on time and prepared for work.
Staff from all the agencies has a clear sense of who is likely to succeed. The BuildingWorks program has the luxury of a two-day tryout (starting at 7:00 am each day) by which time it is obvious to staff as well as participants who is a good match for the program. CYAP, on a shorter timeline, nevertheless managed to keep the intense assessment. “Staff holds very serious conversations with students about barriers they might face in the program. Students need to know what they are getting into, so we make it clear,” says Anthony Watson of the Fifth Avenue Committee. Donald Killinger agrees:

> We want them to be prepared for the work they’re entering. It’s not the office or Duane Reade clerk. This job is hard, and dirty, and people are tough. You can’t have problems with people disrespecting you—this is not a please and thank you business, it’s, “Kid, you do this.”

Students need to be able to read and compute fairly well to complete the course, so they must score at least at the tenth-grade level on the TABE. That eliminates about 20-30% of potential candidates from Cypress Hills, says Herscherberger, and in the last round, that included three of the four women who applied. Each student then has to complete individual meetings with a counselor, an orientation session at Cypress Hills, and a follow-up orientation at NYCCT. By the end of this three-part process, many have selected out, and the pool becomes smaller.

Those who have stayed with it have heard consistent messages about the program, “High expectations and a zero tolerance policy,” says Donald Killinger, “while we let them know that the support mechanisms are there for them.” Zaviel, who graduated from the program in February of 2009, said, “When we went to NYCCT, they gave us shirts and let us know what the schedule was—from 8:00 am to 3:30pm. That was kinda crucial and I had to deal with it.”

Students sign a contract and are given a manual. The rules are clear, if a student is late for the entrance test, he or she does not get to take it. Three unexcused absences or latenesses are permitted before dismissal from the program, but excessive excused absences are also cause for dismissal.

The students are welcomed into the program with warmth and encouragement. They travel to the union headquarters in downtown Manhattan, meet all the staff, and are immediately on a first-name basis.

The incentives that the program offers provide strong motivation to engage and persist. Students receive metro cards, lunch, uniforms, and supplies. “The voucher, food, and clothes were really worth it,” said 22-year-old Arnaldo. “And I got a couple of certificates: OSHA, asbestos, haz (hazardous materials handling). I can get me another job with these licenses til the union calls me up and gives
me an interview.” Chuck Hoffman emphasizes that, “Students have a firm belief that they will get something very concrete out of this—apprenticeship, job, college, an ultimate reward that will be life changing.” They see that there is a ladder system in the union that allows them to progress from one level to the next, so that every stage of training has a reward.

Retention in the BuildingWorks program at Cypress Hills is generally high, averaging between 80% and 90%. In the CYAP program, 29 students started and 22 finished, more than 2/3. The incentives make a difference and so does the environment, relationships with staff, and participation as part of a community of peers:

“Talking to the instructors and everything they’ve been through—they have a lot of experience. I want to be like them. Their stories inspire us.”

“It feels like I am supposed to be here.”

“I have fun every day.”

Life-Skills Training, Academics & Preparation for Work

The startup is intense and packed, challenging students to think about themselves, plan their futures, build computer and algebra skills (passing an algebra exam is required for getting into the electricians union), create resumes, and prepare for the range of trade skills that will be covered in the hands-on portion of the program. The computer and algebra classes are taught by NYCCT professors, and take place for two to three weeks.

The curriculum for the life-skills portion of the program was developed by LaGuardia Community College and modified by Shemira Busby at NYCCT (to concentrate on setting goals and future planning, employment readiness, and problem solving, rather than managing personal relationships and other less work-related topics). Students practice interviewing and communication skills, participate in workshops that cover Ebonics versus standard English, and create resumes. They develop business plans that help them envision not only what is required to construct a project from inception, but also the possibility that they themselves might become entrepreneurs in construction, real estate, or development. They work in groups, taking on the roles involved (architect, general contractor, foreman), make presentations, develop flyers, and then market their proposals.

In the “About Me” portion of the curriculum, young people look at who they are, what they want, and what they need to do to succeed. They find they may need to change their habits, as Zaviel admits:
Waking up was hard! I wasn’t used to waking up at that time. I was lazy but I got adapted to it. A few weeks went by, and I was the one calling my peers waking them up. Now that I’m used to waking up, I can do more things.

The February graduates used MySpace, put pictures of themselves on a DVD, and made a movie of the class that they presented at the graduation to family and friends. “The life skills classes made me see what I wanted,” said Arnaldo. “Ever since I was young I wanted to be my own boss. They helped me motivate myself.”

Classroom-Based Technical Training & On-Site Internships
For the next seven weeks, students are taught by union instructors in the classroom and learn about tools, materials, and techniques, and practice with hands-on activities. They learn to read blueprints, as well as cutting, framing, sheetrocking, insulation, plastering, painting, and a host of other technical skills. As instructor Brian Highbee notes, “Students did not receive training in high school on carpentry, electricity, plumbing, and the like; there are no more shop classes.” He sees part of his job as providing students with information about the different options in the construction trade, so they get an introduction to the industry as they are learning the requisite skills.

Following initial shop class instruction, the program partners work with other non-profits in a “service-learning” component, in which students, under the supervision of master carpenter instructors, participate in actual construction jobs for non-profit organizations. Most recently, this has been coordinated through the organization Rebuilding Together, which links volunteers to projects. The 2008-09 CYAP group was involved in two projects: renovating a house for United Cerebral Palsy and renovating facilities at a community-based immigration counseling center in the Bronx. Students reported that they were well taught, well prepared, and demonstrated they had paid apt attention to the classroom work. Jessen Vasquez concurred, “This class really excelled. They were like sponges.” Luis said:

When Rich showed us the blueprint, it was easy for us to read it. We knew where the lights had to go, and where the door had to go. He was impressed to see who had paid attention in the classroom. First we did demolition—bringing down the walls. Then cement, drylock, framing with the studs. Sometimes we had to wait—we were going too fast! We caught on quick. They saw us and really appreciated us — they said, “It’s not like you were all sleeping in class!”
Students recognize and appreciate what staff is trying to do. Luis continued:

*We had class with John. He does this out of the kindness of his heart. And Rich and Dennis used to talk about how they made a lot of money, and that they’re doing this to help the future. They’re helping young people—they must see something in us to want to teach us instead of being in Florida.*

We picked up “tricks of the trade,” asserted Arnaldo. Students learned to cut sheetrock so that it fit perfectly. They acquired time-saving strategies. “For metal studs that you cut with a special scissors, instead of measuring them one by one, you measure one and use it as a sample. When you’re putting in screws, you hold the screws in the correct order and organize so all the heads face in the same direction.”

The quality of the work spoke to their training, observed Shemira Busby. “The seaming was invisible, you couldn’t see the division between the sheetrock, the doors, and the frames. As first timers, they really showed that they were taught in the right way.” It was good peer pressure,” said Luis. “We all liked to come into the worksite, and we were feeling good about ourselves. We built this. You feel proud. They had us put our signatures in each of the studs.”

*Supports*

The CYAP program surrounded each participant with formal and informal supports. The attitude of the staff toward the young adults, their complete accessibility, and their genuine caring are the bedrock on which the more concrete supports are built:

*We’ve tried to show them that we were them and we are a part of them in some form.*  
*-Shemira Busby*

*They call all the time. I say, do you know it’s Saturday! We’re always texting back and forth.*  
*-Jessen Vasquez*

*Jessen—if it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t be there. While the program was going, any issues, she’s there. Even after the program was out, if I needed help, she was always there.*  
*-Zaviel*
The structure of support includes an array of strategies:

1. **Staff on site.** Staff visits the students’ sites for a full day once a week. Jessen Vasquez spends an entire day, hands-on, with the students. Lowell Herschberger of Cypress Hills sees this aspect of the BuildingWorks/CYAP model as particularly important in building relationships and leading to a high retention rate.

2. **Daily check-ins.** Every day, as soon as she drops her daughter off at school, Jessen Vasquez touches base with the BuildingWorks coordinator and with Shemira Busby to find out who showed up and who didn’t. She follows up the update with calls to those who didn’t come in.

3. **Constant meetings.** The support staff, coordinators, and instructors meet on a regular basis, sometimes daily, to discuss students. They also communicate by email.

4. **Case management.** Staff helps students deal with child care, transportation, being expectant parents, or living in circumstances that are not accommodating. They follow up on crises as they occur and refer students to intervention services if necessary.

5. **Quick response.** When a student is slipping, staff responds immediately with a multi-level process. Donald Killinger characterizes it as, “‘Calling all cars!’ We say to the student, ‘Wait til we tell your mother (i.e. Jessen).’” But, he admits, “Some are not ready for help, and some have situations in their lives, barriers that they can’t overcome, that we can’t help them with.”

6. **Self-help.** Students learn to access New York City’s government website for access to entitlement programs, referral services, and case management.

7. **Family involvement.** Staff involves families and parents in supporting the young adults. For some parents, past disappointments or concerns about their children have led to a loss of faith or reluctance to get too involved at this stage of their lives. “I spend time on the parents,” says Shemira Busby. “I make sure that they know what’s going on. I’ll bring them the signed contract, the manual.” If Jessen Vasquez calls the home and no one answers, she makes an in-person visit to find out what’s going on. “I have kids who are 30 years old now, and I still stay in touch with the parents.”

**Outcomes: Placement, Follow Up & Future Plans**

The graduation took place at the Carpenters Union headquarters in Manhattan in February 2009. A total of 22 students from both NYCCT/Cypress Hills and Fifth Avenue Committee/New York Urban League received certificates of completion, trophies, and gifts. A PowerPoint presentation showed participants in each of the different activities, in the classroom, and at the work site. Instructors and staff talked about how productive the students had been, and conveyed to the families just how much their young adults had accomplished.
The graduation was not an end: students were taking exams for certification, awaiting interviews with the unions, and getting short-term jobs in the interim. The recession has taken a toll but a memo from Donald Killinger to Chuck Hoffman at the end of March, 2009 reported the following:

- **Carpenters not taking anyone in until end of April, due to the collapse of the industry**
- **Two students have been accepted into Con Edison**
- **Two students have been accepted into Local 3 Electricians, though not likely to begin apprenticeship until June, due to economy**
- **One student has been interviewed by DC 9 Painters, results pending**
- **All students took the NYC Asbestos Handler-Worker exam last week, which can lead to short-term employment when season begins shortly**
- **Ten students are on the list to be interviewed in (hopefully) April for Carpenters union**

When students graduate and get their acceptance letter from the union, they start paying union dues; that comes out of their pockets. But the tools they will need are supplied by the program.

Follow up continues on a regular basis. Jessen Vasquez speaks to graduates every day as they work with the job developer to locate part-time work until they get into the union. While Cypress Hills officially does a year of follow up and tracks graduates of the CYAP and BuildingWorks program for two years, Donald Killinger says the relationship lasts as long as the students want it to. “For a lot of our students, the engagement really does go beyond providing training and placement, and for sure, Jessen’s students stay with her forever and ever!”

Despite the wait for admission to the union, students appeared to be very satisfied with the program and what it has done for them. Zaviel commented, “I gained and learned a lot, so I could go out and say I know what to do on that. I accomplished a goal.” He credits the program with “setting him free,” able to get his own apartment, taking on responsibility. Arnaldo appreciated the networks he had built through the program, “I met up with a lot of good people to get into real estate—people I could trust, people to add to my life, not take away from it.”

For some students, next steps include higher education. Luis, for example, is planning to take the SAT in June, and hopes to get into CUNY. Having been involved in the College S.T.E.P.S. program at Cypress Hills, his goal is to get into City College, but if that’s not yet possible, he’ll start with Borough of Manhattan Community College, “to pick up my grades.”
Organizational Structure

Each partner allocates staff and resources to the program. The people who staff the program represent deep expertise across a range of areas pertinent to the work at hand. Like their organizations, staff have overlapping and compatible interests, and each adds value to the other in ways that make the whole more than the sum of the parts.

The grants administration department at CU is responsible for the program at CU, as it does any activity funded through outside channels. Donald Killinger oversees the BuildingWorks and other pre-apprenticeship programs. His background includes a masters in urban affairs, research on workforce development and educational reform at MDRC, and grants administration for an organization serving immigrants in Queens prior to coming to CU six years ago. The CU provides one program coordinator, Brian Higbee, who provides on-site supervision, and instructors, who provide the technical training, including Introduction to Electricity, Asbestos Abatement, OSHA 10, Hazmat, and Carpentry Shop Blueprint Reading.

The CYAP and BuildingWorks programs are located within the Cypress Hills Academic & Career Exploration (CHACE) Center of Cypress Hills under director Lowell Herschberger, MSW. Jessen Vasquez, the Career Training Coordinator, grew up in the Cypress Hills neighborhood and is now a homeowner in the community. She began volunteering at Cypress Hills when she was twelve and has been working there for the past 25 years.

At NYCCT, the CYAP is located within the Division of Adult and Continuing Education under Dean Carol Sonnenblick, within the Workforce Development Center, a 501(c)(3) non-profit headed by Chuck Hoffman, a social worker who has been at the College for 18 years. Hoffman was previously the director of programs at the Community Service Society and the Edwin Gould Foundation, a field instructor at the Hunter School of Social Work, and a probation officer. Shemira Busby began working with Hoffman at the Workforce Development Center in 1998 as a federal work study student, got her AA and BA from NYCCT and her masters from Fordham. Her youth development background extends to her high school jobs as an after-school educator at a Boys and Girls Club and at CAMBA. Busby served as coordinator of the project from the NYCCT side and also taught the life-skills course. NYCCT professors teach the algebra and computer courses.

Each partner provides space for the program. Classes are held at NYCCT, the orientation and graduation are held at the Carpenters Union, and the Cypress Hills CHACE storefront is a gathering place for students at any time of day.
**Costs**
The BuildingWorks program costs approximately $300,000 for 30 students for a 17-week program. The CYAP program, funded at $150,000 by the CEO, was shortened to 13 weeks. The per-student cost is approximately $10,000. It breaks down into costs for MetroCards, lunch, uniforms, tools, and instructional supplies. Students in class for 30-35 hours per week and instructors/professors paid between $40 and $80/hour, plus costs for staff at Cypress Hills and NYCCT.

Both Killinger and Hoffman assert that adequate funding is what makes the program effective in comparison with other employment programs that have lower retention rates and limited long-term gains. “The material incentives and the staff-heavy structure are really important in engaging the students and allowing the students to be successful,” says Hoffman.

Funding was provided through the CEO and supplemented with funds from the Carpenters Union NIEHS funding through the Minority Worker Training Program.

**Lessons & Implications**
The CYAP program appears to be reconnecting young adults to paths to sustainable employment, changing their attitudes about themselves, building marketable skills, linking them to networks of people who can help them move forward, providing certifications that connect them to jobs in the short term, and readying them for the career ladder in the carpentry trades.

**Lessons from Practice**
A number of factors contribute to what made the program work:

- A partnership built on trust and transparency. Strong prior relationships that each of the partners had with at least one of the others made it easy to start and implement the program. The partners shared values and had compatible interests. They built on a prior effective model.

- The combination of high expectations; training in the technical, academic, and social skills to meet those expectations; and a robust system of supports. “It's almost like a case study in youth development,” says Lowell Herschberger.

- Tangible incentives and rewards. “Things that make sense, places where young people would cut corners—we provide them,” remarked Herschberger.

- The right staff. According to Jessen that means, “people with patience, commitment, dedication, and understanding of each individual in the program.” Herschberger says, “It takes really special people to have a level of commitment that goes far beyond. Jessen really pushes the boundaries to reach the young people.” It also means people who are connected to the in-
dustry, who give students the sense that there is a clear path to jobs, advancement, and a comfortable income.

- Having a staff person on site for a full day each week. This enabled young adults to get to know the staff and form deep and affectionate connections, kept staff on top of what was working well or needed to be addressed, and provided first-hand observation of how each participant was doing.

- Constant monitoring and guidance. Staff keeps students on track with day-to-day interventions and supports.

- Identifying students who are likely to benefit. The intensive assessment process and the experience of the staff contributed to selecting young adults with a good chance of success. The staff and program developers are reflective about whether they are creaming and excluding those most in need. They believe that given the relatively short duration of the program, young people need to be ready to engage. They also cite the rapid recruitment for CYAP that did not allow the luxury of being highly selective, yet more than two-thirds finished.

Staff cited two things they would address in the program based on the CYAP experience:

1) Restoring the program to its full length. Shortening the program from 17 to 13 weeks was a result of the limited funding and compromised some important features. It cut the amount of time available for job readiness preparation, especially important for the younger students in the cohort, who need more engagement with and understanding of the job market. It also curtailed the on-site training time, so only one of the groups was able to take the project through to completion, which in turn had an impact on their sense of accomplishment.

2) Focusing and expanding the life-skills training. “The content needs to be more related to the workplace, technical fields, and future planning,” says Busby. She would have focused more on financial literacy, business management, job coaching, interviewing techniques, resume writing and building, and added a CPR course. Donald Killinger concurs, and adds the need for much more time spent on problem solving and conflict resolution. He has noticed that the young adults, when they hit the first barrier, don’t know how to get beyond it. “They have to call if they’re running late. If they don’t, and you ask them why, they will say, ‘My cell phone ran out of minutes.’ It doesn’t occur to them to borrow a friend’s phone, or call from a pay phone.”
An additional issue was noted in the documentation for this report, although not specifically cited by staff—that of gender imbalance. Although the woman who did participate in the program was welcomed and supported, involving females in non-traditional occupations may require more intensive outreach, as well as more attention at younger ages to countering stereotypes about who can do what kind of work.

**Implications for Policy**

A number of potential policy issues emerged in the review of the CYAP program.

- **More robust training models that are adequately funded and of sufficient duration are needed.** The CYAP/BuildingWorks model is intensive and fairly comprehensive. Yet even the longer 17-week program is still a relatively short amount of time. Investment and evaluation of more long-term training options that can really change young adults’ lives and direction is warranted.

- **Cost benefit analyses of these programs would put investments in perspective.** The program has a fairly high per-person cost. Yet when compared to the cost of unemployment to the public—incarceration, public subsistence, and loss of tax revenues and social security contributions—the $10,000 figure is a fraction of the lifetime cost.

- **Rethink outcomes and align funding.** For both the sake of the taxpayers and the participants, success is important. But as Hoffman points out, “Given that your funding is tied to outcomes means you can never provide services to those most in need.” There needs to be a realistic negotiation process between funders and grantees to serve a larger and needier portion of the population for a longer duration. For example, as Herschberger points out, “Workforce Investment Act funding for out-of-school youth is one of the largest sources of funding for this population, but it’s not enough money for a long enough time to reach outcomes. So you’re forced to focus on placements, give them a little training, a little case management, and they’re off making some menial wage—because your outcome was to place them. Yet there is a lot of research that says these short-term youth placement programs don’t help in the long term.”

“A 6-week measure doesn’t tell the story,” says Killinger. “You need to know what happens 1, 2, 3 years out.”
The recession does not bode well for the economic outlook for the disconnected population. Indeed, the last economic recovery in New York City bypassed youth and young adults completely. Funding through the Mayor’s CEO was an appropriate but short-lived solution. Even in times of fiscal restraint, restoring and expanding funding streams during economic downturns is all the more critical.

The CUNY Young Adult Program, as conducted by NYCCT, Cypress Hills, and the Carpenters Union, is a promising model when implemented by strong partners with a youth development framework. The young adults built critical skills and connections to employment, with hope for the future. But their success hinges on investment by society not only in their training but in their ultimate employment. Economic recovery plans must take into account and make provision for this population, for the sake of the young adults, and for the long-term health of the city and nation.

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